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USSR MINISTRIES AND SPECIAL DEPARTMENTS

General Description of the Ministries

The ministry is an organ of state administration which is headed by a member of the government and which directs a specific branch or sphere of state administration within the limits of its competence and in strict accordance with the law.

A branch of state administration is a particular complex of social relations coordinated on a government-wide scale by a single system of administrative organs, such as the administration of the river or maritime fleet, or of the metallurgical or aviation industry, etc.

A sphere of state administration is the activity of a single system of administrative organs of a government-wide scale encompassing all or some branches of administration, such as state control, planning, finance, etc.

The nature of a ministry's activities, therefore, depends primarily on what it directs -- a branch or a sphere of state administration.

The ministry, in the person of its director, bears the responsibilities for its activities before the Supreme Soviet, its Presidium, and the Council of Ministers. The Supreme Soviet forms the government, included in which are all ministers. It also exercises control over the activities of the ministers. The Presidium of the Supreme Soviet checks on the activities of the ministry between sessions of the Supreme Soviet.

The minister is the sole director. One-man authority (edinonachaliye) creates a solid basis for establishing responsibility for the operation of the ministry and its agencies as a whole. For this reason, it not only does not contradict the principle of socialist democracy, but is a necessary condition for real democracy.

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Lenin spoke of the need to combine one-man authority in carrying out executive and management functions with collegiality in discussing basic problems: "...just as collegiality is necessary in the discussion of fundamental problems, so one-man responsibility and management are necessary in order to eliminate red tape and prevent shirking of responsibility." (Lenin, Works, Vol XXIV, p 623.)

These two principles are combined within the ministry in the form of a collegium under the chairmanship of the minister. Members of the collegium are appointed by the Council of Ministers. Considering problems of practical management and the more essential orders of the ministry, checking on execution, selection of personnel, etc., are within the competence of the collegium, but its decisions regarding any of these problems are enforceable only with the agreement of the minister and are put into effect in the form of his order. In accordance with the Stalin Constitution, orders and instructions are issued by the minister, rather than by the ministry or collegium. In case of disagreement with the collegium, the minister puts his own decision into effect, reporting the disagreement to the Council of Ministers, to which the members of the collegium, in their turn, may also appeal.

The combination of one-man authority and collegiality also has two forms. The majority of statutes regarding the ministries are examined not only by the collegiums, but also by the councils of the ministries, which have 40-70 members, of which not less than half represent local organizations and enterprises. These councils of the ministries are set up as links with local organizations and enterprises and as places to exchange experiences. Their decisions, with the agreement of the minister, are put into effect by his orders. Certain ministries also have technical and other councils made up of representatives of different branches of science and technology, etc. These councils are consultative agencies under the ministries for economic problems and technical and production supervision of enterprises.

Branch conferences and meetings are called periodically within the ministries. These are attended by the outstanding people in the various branches of state administration, including directors of enterprises and establishments, engineers and technicians, Stakhanovites, and shock workers. Meetings and conferences are called to discuss the best utilization of the experiences of subordinate workers, production innovators, Stakhanovites, and shock workers, as well as the most important problems of the ministry's operations, on the basis of criticism and self-criticism. The minister alone makes the decisions based on these discussions.

The ministry represents an operational production and technical staff which directs an individual branch of state administration. It is set up, for the most part, on a production-territorial principle. Under the ministries, there are main administrations which manage all aspects of the work of groups of similar enterprises located in a single oblast or several rayons, as, for example, the Main Administration of the Cotton Industry of Moscow Oblast. In addition, there are functional sectors, departments, and administrations which serve the enterprises and establishments under the ministry in any one sphere of its activities.

Chiefs of main administrations, departments, and sectors are appointed by the minister and are subordinate to him. Heads of the various units under the ministry are, as a rule, members of the collegium and the council of the ministry. This helps to unify the administration of the various branches of the ministry and to increase control and checking on the execution of government decrees and the minister's orders.

Up to 1934, the people's commissariats were set up along functional lines, with various functional departments and sectors (rather than a single main administration of the people's commissariat) supervising a single unit of management, such as a plant. This type of organization was acceptable with a comparatively small number of units to be administered, but with the growth of the national economy and the increasingly complicated task of administering it, the functional system proved to be unsuitable. The Seventeenth Party Congress sharply criticized this system (L. M. Kaganovich, Organizatsionnyye voprosy, partiynoye i sovetskoye stroitel'stvo, 1934) pointing out its weakness in operational supervision, bureaucratic perversions and red tape, and separation of the people's commissariats from their objects of administration.

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A directive of the Seventeenth Party Congress resulted in the conversion of the commissariats from functional to production-territorial organization. This was a most important prerequisite to the improvement of organization and operation of all branches and individual objects of administration.

Several functional units were retained with considerably limited rights even after the administrative reorganization. At present, they do not have the right to by-pass the main administrations of the ministry in giving direct instructions to local agencies.

General Description of Special Departments (Vedomstvo)

Special departments are organs of administration under the Council of Ministers, functioning on the same principles as the ministries. They, like the ministries, direct various branches or spheres of state activity within the limits of their competence and in strict conformance with the law.

There are two types of departments: those headed by members of the government, having approximately the same rights as ministries, and those whose directors are not members of the government.

Department directors in the first group (for example, the chairman of the State Planning Committee, etc.) are appointed in the same way as the ministers. Other department directors are appointed by the Council of Ministers.

Directors of special departments operate on the principle of one-man authority, but many of these departments have collegiums. (Several special departments are collegial organs, as, for example, the Committee on Stalin Prizes. In this case, decisions are based on a simple majority vote by sealed ballot and do not require any approval on the part of the committee chairman.) The entire structure of special departments is similar to that of the ministries.

Several ministries now in existence were converted from special departments, including the Ministries of Trade, Agricultural Procurement, State Control, Communal Economy, etc. These special departments are called main administrations, boards (pravleniye), committees, commissions, inspectorates, councils, etc. The difference between these agencies lies in the volume and scope of their authority. Main administrations and administrations are primarily responsible for the production administration of enterprises and other administrative objectives. Committees, commissions, inspectorates, etc., do not have their own enterprises, but are directing or controlling organs, whose supervision extends to all or many branches of administration within the sphere of its activity (coordination, planning, inspection, control, etc.).

Types and System of Ministries and Special Departments

Branches of state administration within the Soviet government may be divided into three groups: branches which by their nature and function require most centralization and which are, therefore, within the exclusive competence of the USSR; branches which are most expediently administered on the basis of a combination of centralization and decentralization and which are, for this reason, directed by USSR organs together with union-republic organs; and branches which reflect to the greatest degree national or other peculiarities of the various union republics and which are, therefore, relegated to direction by them.

Ministries and special departments, in conformance with this, may be divided into all-union, union-republic, and republic.

USSR ministries are divided into all-union and union-republic, both of which direct branches of administration which come within the competence of the USSR.

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All-union ministries direct the branches of state administration entrusted to them throughout the territory of the USSR, either directly or through organs appointed by them, and do not have corresponding ministries in the union republics. The following ministries are in this category:

- Aviation Industry
- Automobile and Tractor Industry
- Foreign Trade
- Armaments
- Geology
- Agricultural Procurement
- State Food and Material Reserves
- Machine and Instrument Building
- Metallurgical Industry
- Maritime Fleet
- Petroleum Industry of the Eastern Regions
- Petroleum Industry of the Southern and Western Regions
- Communications Equipment Industry
- Transportation
- River Fleet
- Communications
- Agricultural Machine Building
- Machine-Tool Building
- Construction- and Road-Machine Building
- Construction of Military and Naval Enterprises
- Construction of Heavy Industry Enterprises
- Construction of Fuel Enterprises
- Shipbuilding Industry
- Transport Machine Building
- Labor Reserves
- Heavy Machine Building
- Coal Industry of the Eastern Regions
- Coal Industry of the Western Regions
- Chemical Industry
- Electrical Industry
- Electric Power Plants

Union-republic ministries of the USSR direct the branches of state administration entrusted to them through the corresponding ministries of the union republics; they administer directly only a definite and limited number of enterprises according to a list confirmed by the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet USSR. The following are union-republic ministries:

- Gustatory Industry
- Internal Affairs
- Armed Forces
- Higher Education
- State Control
- State Security
- Health
- Foreign Affairs
- Cinematography
- Light Industry
- Forestry
- Timber and Paper Industry
- Meat and Dairy Industry
- Food Industry
- Construction Materials Industry
- Fish Industry of the Eastern Regions
- Fish Industry of the Western Regions
- Agriculture

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State Farms
Textile Industry
Trade
Finance
Justice

Special departments of the USSR are also either all-union or union-republic. They are divided on the same basis as the ministries.

The following are all-union special departments and are attached to the Council of Ministers USSR: the Main Administrations of the Hydrometeorological Service, of Geodesy and Cartography, for the Supply of Petroleum Products to the National Economy, for the Supply of Coal to the National Economy, for the Supply of Timber and Wood to the National Economy, for Oxygen, of Liquid Fuel and Gas, of the Northern Sea Route, and of the State Mining Inspection; the Committees of Standards, for Affairs of Measures and Measuring Instruments, for Stalin Prizes in the Fields of Science, Military Science, and Invention, for Stalin Prizes in the Fields of Literature and Art, for Material and Technical Supply to the National Economy, for the Introduction of Advanced Technique into the National Economy, and for the Restoration of the Economy in Regions Liberated from the German Occupation; the Councils for Collective Farm Affairs, for Russian Orthodox Church Affairs, and for Religious Cult Affairs; the Technical Council for Mechanization of Labor-Consuming and Heavy Work; and the Soviet Information Bureau.

The following are union-republic special departments of the USSR: (a) the State Planning Committee and the All-Union Committee for Arts Affairs, which are on a level with the ministries; and (b) the Committees for Physical Culture and Sports Affairs, for Radiofication and Radio Broadcasting, and for Architectural Affairs; the Main Administration for Affairs of Industrial and Consumer Cooperatives; the Resettlement Administration; the Main Statistics Administration; as well as the State Arbitration of the USSR and the Telegraph Agency of the USSR (TASS), all of which are attached to the Council of Ministers.

Ministries of the union republics are either union-republic or republic. Union-republic ministries are subordinate to both the council of ministers of the union republic and to the corresponding union-republic ministry of the USSR (see above list).

Republic ministries are those which have no corresponding USSR ministry and which direct the branches of state administration entrusted to them; they are directly subordinate only to the council of ministers of the union republic and include the Ministries of Automobile Transport, Communal Economy, Local Industry, Education, and Social Security. Certain union republics have the following ministries in addition to those listed above: Water Economy (in the Turkestan, Kazakh, Kirgiz, Uzbek, Tadzhik, Azerbaydzhan, Georgian, and Armenian SSR); Local Fuel Industry (in the RSFSR, Ukrainian, Belorussian, Karelo-Finnish, and Latvian SSR); Reclamation (melioratsiya) (Belorussian SSR); for Civilian Housing Construction (RSFSR, Ukrainian, Belorussian, Moldavian, Latvian, and Estonian SSR); Furniture and Woodworking Industry (Ukrainian SSR); for Construction (Lithuanian SSR); and Shale-Chemical Industry (Estonian SSR).

Special departments of the union republics are also divided into union-republic and republic. The union-republic special departments are listed above.

The following are republic special departments: (a) the Committee for Affairs of Cultural and Educational Institutions, which is on a level with the ministries; and (b) the main administrations and administrations of Roads, of Local Forests, for Preserves, and for Zoological Gardens and Parks; State Inspectorate for Hunting; Technical Mine Inspectorate; State Construction Control; and State Publishers.

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Ministries of autonomous republics direct the branches of state administration which come within the competence of the ASSR and are subordinate to both the council of ministers of the ASSR and the corresponding ministry of the union republic. The constitutions of the union republics under which there are autonomous republics provide for the formation of 11 ministries in each ASSR: Internal Affairs, State Security, Health, Communal Economy, Local Industry, Education, Agriculture, Social Security, Trade, Finance, and Justice. In accordance with the economic characteristics of the ASSR and with the confirmation of the supreme soviet of the union republic, certain autonomous republics have Ministries of Light, Timber, Meat and Dairy, Food, Fish, and Timber Industries.

The special departments of autonomous republics are the State Planning Commission, Administration for Arts Affairs, Administration for Cultural and Educational Institutions, Roads Administration, Automobile Transport Administration, Administration of the Local Fuel Industry, and Administration of the Construction Materials Industry. All of these departments have equal rights with the ministries.

The various branches of state administration demand different degrees of centralization of direction. As a result, certain ministries and departments are subordinate only to the center, while for others there is a dual subordination. Dual subordination is necessary where there is a need to be able to take into account the unavoidability of existing differences. Agriculture in Kaluga Guberniya is not the same as in Kazan'... The same applies to all types of administration. Not to take into account local differences in all of these problems would mean to fall into bureaucratic centralism, etc., and to hinder local workers in that consideration of local differences which is the basis of intelligent work." (Lenin, Works, Vol XXVII, pp 298-299)

Dual subordination means that orders of union-republic ministries and special departments of the USSR are obligatory for the corresponding ministries and departments of the union republics. Union-republic ministries and special departments of the USSR have the right to suspend and abrogate acts of corresponding ministries and departments of union republics when these conflict with either directives issued by them or all-union legislation, at the same time informing the Council of Ministers of the appropriate union republic of their action. For example, in accordance with the Statute on the Ministry of Trade USSR (see SP SSSR /Collection of Decrees of the USSR/, No 15, Art 95, 1938), the Minister of Trade USSR suspends and abrogates orders and instructions of the Ministers of Trade of the union republics which conflict with laws and decrees of the USSR government. This right, however, does not extend to cases in which acts of ministers and heads of special departments of a union republic are based on an exact direction of a law of the union republic or government of that republic. In this case, the corresponding ministry or special department of the USSR protests the indicated acts to the Council of Ministers USSR.

Union-republic ministries and special departments of the USSR direct and control the work of corresponding ministries and departments of the union republics. Union-republic ministries and special departments of the USSR have the right to deal directly with any local organ of corresponding ministries and departments of a union-republic, as well as with corresponding ministries and departments of an ASSR, concerning problems under their immediate control. In accordance with a 6 January 1930 decree of the Council of People's Commissars USSR (Svod Zakonov, No 3, Art 44, 1930), the Ministry of Agriculture USSR has the right of direct relations with local agricultural organs concerning problems which come under the immediate control of the ministry. Regarding problems which come within the competence of the union republics, this ministry deals with local organs through the Ministry of Agriculture of the union republics. The Ministry of Agriculture USSR, in dealing directly with local organs, is obligated to advise the Ministry of Agriculture of the union republics of the matter immediately.

A description of the interrelationships of the union-republic ministries of the USSR and the union republics would be incomplete without a word on the interrelationships of the main administrations of these ministries. For example, according to the Statute on the Ministry of Light Industry USSR (Sbornik prikazov NKLP SSSR, No 41, 1938), these interrelationships are as follows: orders of chiefs of main administrations of the Ministry of Light Industry USSR to chiefs of corresponding administrations

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of ministries of light industry of union republics are in force if they do not contradict orders and instructions of the Minister of Light Industry of the union republic or if they are not suspended by him. A main administration of the Ministry of Light Industry USSR cannot abrogate an order of a Minister of Light Industry of a union republic, but an act of a main administration of the USSR ministry may be suspended by the Minister of Light Industry of the union republic.

Interrelationships between ministries and special departments of union republics and ministries and special departments of ASSR are conducted in the same manner. Prior to 1936, people's commissariats of the ASSR were divided into autonomous and united (ob'yedinennyy). Autonomous people's commissariats corresponded to the republic people's commissariats of the union republics and were directly subordinate only to the Central Executive Committee of the ASSR, its Presidium, and the Council of People's Commissars of the ASSR in carrying out their decrees, directives, and assignments.

United people's commissariats of the ASSR were those which had the same names as the united people's commissariats of the union republics. United people's commissariats of the ASSR were subordinate on the one hand to the Central Executive Committee, the Presidium, and the Council of People's Commissars of the ASSR, and on the other to the corresponding united people's commissariat of the union republic; i.e., they operated on the principles of dual subordination.

In practice, the differences between the autonomous and united people's commissariats gradually disappeared, and finally, the principles of dual subordination were extended to all people's commissariats of the ASSR. The new constitutions simply established that which already existed, and subordinated people's commissariats of the ASSR to both the Council of People's Commissars of the ASSR and to the corresponding people's commissariats of the union republic.

Competence of Ministries and Special Departments

Ministries and Special departments in their activities encompass all branches and spheres of state and public life. According to the Stalin Constitution, the ministries "direct the branch of state administration entrusted to them." The more detailed competence of ministries and special departments is determined in special statutes confirmed by the government. Ministers and directors of special departments direct, in the branch or sphere of administration subordinate to them, the compilation and execution of production and financial plans, which are confirmed by the government; the marketing of production and fulfillment of plans for the distribution of production, which are confirmed by the government; the organization of technical assistance to institutions and enterprises within their jurisdiction, introduction of new techniques into production, and development of technical improvements and inventions; and adopt, within the limits of their authority, measures to increase and safeguard socialist property. Ministers and directors of special departments are concerned with the problems of training and retraining personnel as well as wages and labor organization; they adopt measures to strengthen state and labor discipline among workers in branches of administration subordinate to them or within their jurisdiction, and guarantee strict observance of socialist legality.

The following come within the competence of the ministers and directors of special departments: the organization, within the limits of the approved personnel allotment, of new trusts, combines, offices, enterprises, institutions, and affiliates; problems of merging, joining, separating, and liquidating economic organizations subordinate to them, and subsequent notification of the government; transfer of enterprises, buildings, and installations from one economic organization to another within the department; confirmation of charters and statutes of trusts, combines, offices, and enterprises within their jurisdiction; distribution and redistribution of the material resources of the ministry or special department among the individual enterprises and institutions of the subordinate branch of administration; and adoption of measures to strengthen the finance and credit setup.

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During the Patriotic War, the people's commissars of the USSR were given the right to: distribute the capital investment of the people's commissariat among its various enterprises; finance the restoration of war-destroyed enterprises and houses from capital investment accounts, noncentrally planned (vnelimnnyy) expenditures, and capital repair, and, in the absence of these resources, from current production accounts; and solve problems in connection with partial changes in approved wage estimates and funds, and also in connection with payment of expenses incurred under extraordinary wartime conditions (Sbornik rukovodnykh materialov i konsul'tatsiy po stroitel'stvu, No 8, 1941, p 1). These powers have basically been retained by the ministries during the period of transition to peacetime construction.

Acts of Ministers and Directors of Special Departments

Ministers and heads of special departments, in directing branches of state administration, issue legal acts.

The authority of the ministers to issue acts of state administration is expressed in Articles 73 and 85 of the USSR Constitution and corresponding articles of the union-republic constitutions. The indicated articles provide that the ministers have the right to issue orders and instructions only on the basis of and in execution of laws in operation and acts of higher government organs within the limits of the jurisdiction of their respective ministries; orders and instructions, or acts, are the personal prerogative of the minister; and the ministers check on their execution.

An order (prikaz) is an obligatory direction possessing the power of the official and is addressed to subordinate officials and organs or citizens. Orders are either executive or regulatory.

By means of orders, officials:

1. Regulate the organization and activity of subordinate organizations (for example, an order of the minister on the structure of a trust or a statute approved by the minister on a particular part of the ministry);
2. Require specific behavior or action of subordinate officials or citizens (for example, an order of the minister requiring the director of an enterprise to set up the production of a new type of product, or an order of the Minister of Transportation forbidding passengers to remain on the platform while the train is in motion);
3. Establish various regulations for subordinate officials or citizens (for example, an order for an appointment to or removal from a position).

An order may be either a direction for a single action, or a general standard to be applied to an indeterminate number of cases.

An instruction (instruktsiya), in the juridical sense, is an obligatory direction on the application of laws, government regulations, or other normative acts, handed down by an authorized official to his subordinates. The difference between orders and instructions is, primarily, that an order may be general or individual, while instructions are always general in character.

An instruction gives directions as to how a law should be applied, while an order, in the majority of cases, is itself the application of the law, i.e. the application of a general standard to a particular instance. An order of a minister granting a member of the collegium of the ministry ordinary leave is the application of the KZot (Labor Code) to a particular case. An instruction of the minister on the application of the agricultural tax law is of a different character. It is not the application of the law to an individual farm, but is only a general direction as to how it is to be done. In actuality, every instruction itself requires application, since it establishes general standards, and is, consequently, an act of regulatory character. A directive instruction on the agricultural tax is realized in the orders of the lower financial organs to which it is addressed.

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An instruction cannot be a legal act covering a single action; it is impossible, for example, by means of an instruction to establish or abolish a given organ, or to reward or punish an individual, both of these being measures which call for individual acts. Such measures are carried out in the form of orders in the name of the minister.

An order may be addressed to organs, officials, and citizens; an instruction is usually addressed only to organs and officials. An instruction is not addressed directly to citizens, although in action, in directing the activities of organs of administration, it reaches down to the citizens, in one way or another touching upon their rights and obligations. An order or instruction of a minister may be abrogated either by the government or by a higher minister.

The Council of Ministers may abrogate any order of a minister. A higher minister may abrogate an order of a lower minister only when it contradicts his the higher minister's laws, personal orders, or other acts of higher government organs.

Acts of directors of special departments are similar to acts of ministers. Directors of special departments also issue orders and instructions and check on their execution. Ministers and directors of special departments may issue joint orders and instructions concerning questions which touch upon the activities of two or several ministries and departments. Orders and instructions which establish obligations for citizens or institutions and enterprises not subordinate to the given ministry or special department are subject to government confirmation. An act of a minister or director of a special department which is confirmed by the government has the juridical power of a government act.

Local Organs of Ministries and Special Departments

Ministries and special departments direct a large number of objects of administration, usually located throughout the territory of the government; this makes impossible direct administration of all these objects from a single center. Ministries and special departments, therefore, have agencies endowed with certain rights in the various localities to aid in taking into account local differences and peculiarities and to carry out the administration, without constraining the initiative and independent activity of local organs of state power.

First and foremost among the organs of all-union ministries and departments are their authorized representatives (upolnomochennyy) in the republics. Not all all-union ministries have their authorized representatives in union and autonomous republics, however, since the USSR Constitution does not establish the institution of authorized representatives as being obligatory.

In addition to the authorized representatives, all-union ministries and special departments have local agencies set up according to either territory or production. To the first group belong the local agencies of the Ministries of Communications, Agricultural Procurement, etc. Local agencies of the Ministry of Communications include the communications administrations of union republics, ASSR, krais, and oblasts, and the rayon communications sections.

All-union industrial and transport ministries and special departments set up their local agencies on the production principle. Transport ministries have railroad okrugs (districts), administrations of railroad systems, rayon administrations, maritime ship lines, river ship lines, seaport administrations, river basin route administrations, etc. Trusts and combines are the local agencies of the industrial ministries.

Both territorial- and production-type local organs of all-union ministries and special departments differ from local organs of republic and union-republic ministries and special departments in that they are subordinate only in a vertical line, while local organs of republic and union-republic ministries are also subordinate in a horizontal line: horizontally to local soviets of workers deputies and their executive committees, and vertically to the corresponding ministries and special departments.

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Union-republic ministries and special departments of the USSR do not have local territorial agencies. They utilize the local apparatus of the union-republic ministries and departments of the various union republics and have local production agencies (trusts) only for the direction of enterprises directly subordinate to them. They direct the remaining objects of administration which come under union-republic ministries and departments of the USSR through the corresponding ministries and departments of the union republic.

Organs (sections and administrations) of executive committees of soviets of workers deputies are also the territorial agencies of union republic and republic ministries and special departments of union and autonomous republics.

For a further discussion of the organization and functions of ministries and departments in the USSR and its republics, see Andrei Y. Vyshinsky's The Law of the Soviet State, New York, 1948, Chapter VI, Section 3. Vyshinsky covers more thoroughly the early development of the people's commissariats.

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